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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the role of the school psychologist and how this role can be broadened to encompass areas other than just test administration, and takes a look at what additional knowledge is needed in order to fill more consultative and administrative roles. Through better training programs, the school psychologist is beginning to perform functions as leader and policy maker in the schools. It is possible for the psychologist's services to be called upon for assistance in developing possible solutions if he/she is prepared to design plans of action and accept responsibility for implementation. As the school psychologist offers a plan for dealing with a crisis, he/she needs to take into consideration administrative issues such as community pressure, resistance to change, personnel issues, and various financial issues. The author feels that schools can benefit from more of the expertise of school psychologists, if the crises that administrators continuously face are seen as opportunities for greater involvement in the total functioning of schools. (YRJ)

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SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST AS SUPERINTENDENT'S CONSULTANT

Matthew Snapp, Ph.D.

In recent years, school psychologists have come to complain more and more about being locked into the traditional and unchallenging role of test administrator. A number of factors appear to have contributed to this problem. School Psychologists have done an overzealous job in marketing their assessment expertise. That is, they have convinced educators that their testing skills are a valuable and effective means of utilizing their time. This, combined with the increased demands for special education has contributed to the school psychologist being primarily used as "gate keepers" between regular and special education. This has been especially true since the early 60's when the priorities of the Kennedy family and administration focused the attention of the nation on the plight of the mentally retarded. Consequently, more federal money became available for special programs for the handicapped. Thus, as special programs grew the demand for the "gate keeper" increased significantly.

School psychologists themselves have contributed in other ways to limiting their role. Though their skill and expertise has been acknowledged in this area, a problem seems to arise, however, when they try to become involved in other activities such as mental health consultation.

Nevertheless, the opportunities for expanding the role of the school psychologist are increasing. Better training programs have produced highly qualified persons who are beginning to perform functions as leaders and policy makers in the schools. Conflicts between central and local administrators, teachers and administration, community groups and schools, the discipline problems existing in schools, and of course, the increase

of substance abuse are common problems for today's educators which require training and experience in communication skills, organizational diagnosis and intervention, and conflict management.

It has been the experience of one school psychologist that as crises arise for administrators, the psychologist's services can be called upon for assistance in developing possible solutions. This can occur if the school psychologist is prepared to design plans of action and accept responsibility for implementation. Most administrators seem willing to allow for the implementation of innovative programs when they are clearly developed. As the school psychologist offers a plan for dealing with a crisis, he/she needs to take into consideration administrative issues such as: community pressure, resistance to change within the system, personnel issues, and the cost and "payoff" educationally and financially to the school system. To increase the attractiveness of such proposals the plan should include time lines, personnel to be involved, issues to be considered by the school and community and ways to undercut negative responses to the proposed innovation.

The following are examples of responses by a school psychologist to crises which confronted a superintendent in a large school system in the Southwest.

Toward the end of the first full semester of the superintendent's contract with the school system, he received a recommendation for long term suspension of a junior high school student. The suspension recommendation was brought about because the student was found in possession of marijuana. He had been found with one "joint" of marijuana with ten days left in the semester. The consequences of which would be that the student would lose credit for all 8th grade coursework which he would be forced to repeat, thus precluding

his promotion to high school with his classmates. The superintendent sent copies of the suspension notice to a number of persons in the central office, including the school psychologist, asking for any recommendations for handling the suspension recommendation. Seeing this as a potential opportunity to effect change in dealing with drug abuse and discipline problems, the psychologist asked for time with the superintendent to discuss the situation. At that time a plan was laid out to the superintendent in which it was pointed out that the junior high school from which the student was suspended had been experiencing an increase in drug abuse, and that a brief investigation with the counselors had revealed that the student suspended was a member of a group of about twenty students who seemed to be responsible for most of the drug use and distribution on campus. It seemed that these twenty students had a great deal of status within the student body for their drug abuse activities.

The school psychologist asked for an opportunity to use this suspension as a way to intervene into that particular student group as an attempt to change the reason for their having status in the school. He described the following plan to the superintendent. The school psychologist with the help of the counselors would call together the twenty students and set up a meeting with them without any of the local school personnel. He would indicate his belief that they were aware of, and could control the drug activities on campus, which could be capitalized upon. He would offer a "deal". This group of twenty students could be responsible for the school psychologist going back to the superintendent and asking for the revocation of the friend's suspension if all drugs were removed from the campus. The superintendent's role was just to be willing to listen to the psychologist's request for the suspension to be revoked. The school psychologist assumed

full responsibility for trying to convince the students and the local campus personnel to accept the strategy. The superintendent agreed. The school psychologist then went to the school, asked the counselors to invite the twenty individuals to attend a meeting with the school psychologist. The students came in with obvious concern as to why they were being brought together. They were given the information and asked to make the decision. At first the students were only interested in denying any involvement with drugs. It was made clear to them that there was no interest in discussing whether they were innocent or guilty only in whether they would want to help their friend. If the school were cleaned up and if no drugs were on the campus for the last days of school, the school psychologist would then go to the superintendent and ask that the student be reinstated. It also was made clear that the twenty students would be given full credit with their schoolmates for bringing their friend back into school. Therefore, they could get status for saving their friend and their friend's school credit for cleaning up the school. It was agreed upon. The superintendent reinstated the student. The campus was "clean" for the remainder of the school semester.

With this action the school psychologist established himself as a major resource for assisting the superintendent with difficult discipline problems. Five years later, he continues to be consulted by the superintendent on ways to more effectively handle student problems and broad scale discipline policy matters as the needs of the district change.

In 1973, four members of the seven member school board expressed an interest in eliminating corporal punishment from the school district. They asked the superintendent to survey administrators and teachers throughout

the district on current practices related to corporal punishment and attitudes toward its continued use. The superintendent asked the school psychologist to conduct the study which was designed and carried out. However, rather than just reporting results of the survey on corporal punishment, the survey was seen as an opportunity to begin a process of developing within district personnel techniques for managing students. The survey contained questions designed to determine interest in training in skills in the use of alternatives to corporal punishment. In addition, the school psychologist asked a staff of psychologists and teachers to compile the various alternatives that they were familiar with into a section that could be included in the survey as an appendix to the report to the school board.

As it turned out, the board received most positively the section on alternatives to corporal punishment and encouraged the administration to pursue ways to train teachers in their use. A design for training was developed followed by a proposal submitted to the National Institute of Mental Health for funds. As a result, there began a major staff development effort for non-punitive management techniques as a major preventative mental health program. At this time, three years later, a staff of ten teachers working under the direction of three psychologists work full time on staff development for teachers in classroom management techniques. Staff development is provided in workshop form to schools, small groups of teachers, and to individual teachers.

In the school district being discussed, just over 20% of the student population is Mexican-American. The Mexican-American students represent a major instructional priority for the district. Bi-linqual education has

existed in the district for nine years and in the past few years state and federal funds have greatly enhanced bi-lingual programs. At this time about 10% of the principals and 1 of the 5 assistant superintendents are Mexican-American.

A problem developed between the Mexican-American assistant superintendent who is responsible for the bi-lingual education program and five Mexican-American elementary principals who were dissatisfied with the management of the program. They accused the assistant superintendent of acting like a "Patron" with them, i.e. autocratic, condescending, etc. They said that he did not communicate with them or manifest any value of them as individuals. They believed that he made decisions in isolation and did not consult them on matters that affected them and their schools. The assistant superintendent saw the principals as impatient and unwilling to understand the district-wide problems that he had to attend to. He seemed satisfied with the progress of the bi-lingual programs.

The principals became very frustrated and extremely angry over an issue which seemed representative of their general concerns. They had ordered books and materials but had not received them. They became aware that the supplies existed in a district warehouse. When they questioned the assistant superintendent about the supplies, they were told that approval was needed from the Regional HEW Office before the books and materials could be distributed. The principals decided to act. They took a truck to the warehouse, loaded up the supplies, and took them to their schools.

The superintendent found himself in a difficult situation. He wanted to support the assistant superintendent because he believed that the decision

to hold the materials until final approval came was appropriate. He saw the principals behavior as insubordinate but he did understand their frustration and concerns about wanting to communicate more effectively with the assistant superintendent. He asked the school psychologist for advice, who responded by asking for an opportunity to intervene in the following ways:

1. to use a conflict management technique. That is, bring the principals and the assistant superintendent together to focus on the immediate problem as well as the general communication problem.
2. to attempt to negotiate a solution of the present problem by establishing ground rules for communicating and to set 6 sessions during which the principals and the assistant superintendent and the school psychologist would continue to meet to discuss on-going problems.
3. all discussion would follow the ground rules that would be agreed on in the first session.

The superintendent agreed to the plan. He instructed the principals and the assistant superintendent to meet with the school psychologist and asked that a report be sent to him after the sessions ended. All parties were very willing to cooperate and try this approach in solving their problems. Specific identification of the problems, role playing and role reversals helped to identify the issues and brought about some effective decision making in ways to facilitate a more effective working relationship. It should be pointed out too that the school psychologist asked the superintendent to take no administrative action until the sessions were held in order to avoid the need to act in a punitive fashion to any or all

of the parties involved. Because of the agreements that were developed the superintendent did not have to become directly involved and was satisfied that the problem was solved.

The preceding examples have been presented to demonstrate a way that school psychologists can expand their role to that of consultant to administrators. In these cases, the school psychologist became a consultant to the superintendent by taking advantage of opportunities to work in areas usually reserved for, or left to, administrators.

Discipline problems continue to be a major problem confronting public school administrators. They also provide an opportunity for school psychologists to offer to local and central administrators much needed assistance in handling school problems. Discipline problems have generally been avoided except for some preventative programs. Responding to misbehavior has been seen as the responsibility of administrators. However, if we as school psychologists are willing to share that responsibility, we may find ourselves used in ways other than merely diagnosticians.

It does seem that we no longer need complain about not being allowed to expand our roles beyond testing. Consultation, organization development, program planning, various kinds of psychotherapeutic intervention, curriculum development, etc. can be the services sought from school psychologists. Schools can benefit from more of the expertise of school psychologists, if we see the crises that administrators continuously face as opportunities for greater involvement in the total functioning of schools.